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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER

## Empowering Employment of Women and Marginalized People Through Entrepreneurship Education in Serbia



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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of the paper is to identify discriminatory barriers in employment and put in place policies aimed at achieving equity. The research is conducted on a representative sample of 300 respondents in Belgrade (Serbia). In this paper, special attention was paid to the following issues. These are: (a) the issues of determining the form of social exclusion that is the most common in Serbia; (b) determining the cause of the faster leaving the educational processes of marginalized groups compared to other population groups; (c) identifying the causes of difficult employment of marginalized groups in Serbia.. The research findings suggest that economic restructuring and transformation of a system in Serbia exclude certain groups from the labour market due to the fact that their qualifications do not match the needs of the new system. The lack of appropriate educational programs tailored to the needs of marginalized groups in Serbia is not the only major cause of social exclusion and the lack of employment opportunities. Also, certain population groups are discriminated because of various stereotypes, stigma and prejudice. With this in mind, Serbia should make greater effort to remove the existing obstacles. This will significantly contribute to the growth of employment, which would give a chance to all unemployed persons who are marginalized on a certain basis to be socially involved.*

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**KEY WORDS:** *discrimination, social inclusion, entrepreneurship, education, employment, marginalized groups, Serbia*

## **Introduction**

Economic restructuring and transformation of an economic system exclude certain groups from the labour market due to the fact that their qualifications do not match the needs of the new system. Besides that, certain population groups can be discriminated against because of various stereotypes, stigma and prejudice. It leads to their economic and social vulnerability that usually follows them throughout their life. Therefore, reaching equality among all population groups in contemporary society represent moral imperatives. Accordingly, the Europe 2020 Strategy pays special attention to social programs for the most vulnerable social groups and their inclusion in innovative education programs (Radovic-Markovic, et al 2014). These programs should enable their more rapid and easier employment. Also, innovative programs are aimed at fighting discrimination (age, gender, racial and other). Addressing this issue is of special importance for Serbia on its path to EU integration. Although the Anti-discrimination law was passed in 2009, Serbia is still far from a tolerant society where differences are respected and all citizens exercise their rights undisturbedly (EurActiv, 2013). The availability of education and a reform of education programs according to the needs of this population group affect a decrease in discrimination directly. Namely, the new education programs should be based on individual's growth and be able to foster the individuality, flexibility and personality enabling development and showing a clear path toward the following (Radovic Markovic, 2012):

- promoting achievement;
- tackling barriers to inclusion.

Thus, educational institutions need to become more responsible in terms of providing support to the Romani, the disabled and those who are excommunicated and are not in an equal position with other groups. This is, perhaps, where we can find the key to overcoming inequalities and discrimination that starts back in school (Furlong, Ferguson and Tilleczek 2011).

The main aim of our research is to bring some light into the opportunities for members of marginalized groups to realise their right to

**education** and to identify which causes difficulty in their employment recruiting in the country.

## **Literature Review**

Socio-economic inclusion (integration) of marginalized communities has the ultimate goal to provide for such communities an equal (or at least improved) access to jobs, education, and health services (Economic Commission, 2011). The opinion of a number of scientists is that creators of social and economic policies and the inadequacy of implemented programs are largely responsible for differences in terms of opportunities for people to achieve equal rights (Hastings, 1998). The literature review shows the correlation between marginalized groups and discrimination is not recognized in all the countries. For these reasons, there are no proper strategies that will support discriminated people. Marginalization of population can be determined based on a combination of relevant indicators, such as indicators of high rate of long-term unemployment, low level of education, discrimination, high exposure to health risks or lack of access to health care (Economic Commission, 2011). Employment is essential not only to achieve economic security of the individual, but also for his or her physical and mental health, personal well-being and the sense of identity. Numerous studies have shown that the relevant education can lead to improvements in self-esteem (Carlton & Soulsby, 1999, Dench and Regan, 1999), communication skills (Emler and Fraser, 1999; Radovic-Markovic, 2011a), the sense of belonging to a social group (Emler and Fraser, 1999; Jarvis and Walker, 1997), as well as the achievement of personal identity (Radovic-Markovic et al, 2012b). Also, education that accompanies the needs of the individual, encourages creative and logical thinking (Radovic-Markovic, 2012 c). Therefore, it can be concluded that proper education leads to improvements in social, economic and personal lives. Namely, the level of qualification and business skills are directly related to the degree of employability (UNDP, 2006). Therefore, the identification of a subset of young people who are outside the formal education and understanding their needs and situations in which they are located is one of the most important tasks of any society. For the marginalized and those young people who have left schools, illiteracy and the lack of basic life skills reduce their life chances, including access to employment. Basic life skills may include capabilities such as the development of communication skills, respect for

the work ethic, developing the ability to resolve conflict situations or making decisions. They can include management skills that support business development, with emphasis on developing entrepreneurial capabilities. However, one of the problems faced by many countries is the provision of funding mechanisms that facilitate the education of marginalized groups. Programs tailored to their needs are very expensive and in many developing countries state funding is insufficient to meet the high cost of equipment, materials, infrastructure and training of instructors to work with these groups. These groups often have better access to informal education, organized by NGOs, than to formal ones. It is necessary to define the standards of quality of informal training programs and carry out monitoring of complying to these standards. This will facilitate the integration of these groups into the labour market and lifelong learning (Bessette, 2011). Accordingly, the promotion of social inclusion implies, above all, the inclusion of all marginalized groups in lifelong learning and paid employment (IFSW, 2012). It will, in the long run, contribute to reducing inequalities and achieving inclusive growth (UNDP, 2010). The World Bank study (2006) showed that greater inclusion of marginalized groups consequently leads to inclusive growth and improves economic and social development of a country. For these reasons, policy makers, more than ever, deal with the issues of social inclusion.

### **Social Exclusion and Discrimination in Employment in Serbia**

Types and forms of social exclusion vary from country to country in terms of their perceptions and development. The debate on social exclusion in the European context has led to the development of the concept in two ways: a) focus on the factors that lead to poverty and b) the development of a multidimensional concept that cannot be directly associated with income (Berghman, 1995). The consequences of social exclusion (NGEC, 2011), reflect on (Radovic-Markovic, 2016):

- Poverty;
- Political exclusion and discrimination;
- Limited approach to educational possibilities;
- Identity issues;
- Negative stereotypes.

Various forms of discrimination in employment can be observed in Serbia. It is especially evident in the recruitment of younger women in their reproductive age. They are often offered short term employment and part time employment, to minimize the cost of paying for pregnancy and maternity leaves. Older persons are also at high risk of marginalization, as well as women over 55 years of age. In Serbia, according to a research, there is still discrimination against persons between 55 and 64 years of age in employment, which is reflected in the lack of demand for them in the labour market (Radovic-Markovic, 2011). The reasons for this are multiple. First of all, it is believed that older workers are less productive, do not have adequate knowledge, are slower to accept change and are not willing to improve and adapt to the current demands of the workplace (Radovic-Markovic, 2012a). Namely, by observation of the structure of unemployed persons by age in Serbia, it is seen that in the category of persons between 50 and 64 there are 192,408 persons or 25.9% of the total number of the unemployed (NES, October 2014). The analysis of the unemployment rate of persons of working age (55 - 64) in the period from 2004 to 2014 shows that there has been a steady growth of the unemployment rate, i.e. from 7.8 percent in 2004 to 12.2 percent in 2010 (Radovic-Markovic, 2011) and 14.2% in 2014 (NES, October 2014). In other words, the unemployment rate of persons older than 55 years of age has almost doubled in the last ten years.

Also, few people with disabilities are able to find employment in Serbia. Around 15,500 of disabled people in Serbia waited for a job (on June 31, 2014), out of which there were about 5,000 women, while in Vojvodina there were about 5,300 people with disabilities without job, including 1,500 women. Discrimination occurs in those cases where a candidate for a job, despite the necessary qualifications, is not taken into account due to his or her disability. Namely, in the workplace, employers' attitudes are a significant barrier to persons with disabilities gaining access to meaningful work and job promotions.

The employment of people with disabilities, particularly people with intellectual disabilities, is very important, given the fact that it is a group of people who has been excluded from all social flows for decades, resulting in the lack of skills and the lack of opportunities to enter labour market.

The Law on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons of the Republic of Serbia (RS Official Gazette, 36/2009),

recognizes people with disabilities as a group that requires special attention due to extremely low level of employment.

The measure by which persons with disabilities are entitled to education and employment, is the extent to which they can develop their potential and become an active members of society (Odović, Rapaic and Nedović, 2008, 189 p.). The social position of the Romani people in Serbia is also very unfavourable. That is shown by the employment rates of the Romani and displaced persons, which are between 5 and 10 percent lower than the average rate of unemployment (Radovic-Markovic & Chair, 2010). The latest data showed (on June 31, 2014), that there were about 23,706 Romani people without a job, out of which 10,800 women and in Vojvodina there were 6,150 unemployed Romani people, among them about 2,900 women (Centre for Development of Syndicalism, 2014). The workers belonging to those population groups are poor and more likely to be engaged in informal sector of economy (Radovic-Markovic, 2010).

The high representation of women in the structure of unemployed persons older than 55 years of age explains the existence of stereotypes that exist among employers during recruitment. According to them, women in this age group are not sufficiently prepared to meet their workloads, are not sufficiently physically attractive, do not have contemporary knowledge and are not ready to be trained. Despite these stereotypes, recent research has shown that workers of both sexes are willing to be trained and to learn, for which they need adequate support (Radovic-Markovic, 2012). This support is important both from the state and educational institutions. In countries where women face difficulties in obtaining a job in formal economy due to existing stereotypes, they are deprived of their livelihood (Hill and Macan, 1996). It forces them to work in the informal sector, which is the case with discriminated persons in Serbia. For these reasons, the inclusion of older people in the development of society contributes to their welfare and the welfare of a society as a whole. Therefore, their inclusion by promoting their social, economic and intellectual contribution to society through providing them with opportunities to make decisions at all levels is needed.

## **Methodology**

The research was carried out in 15 NGOs and associations of the Romani people, persons with disabilities and the displaced people from the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

The sample encompassed 274 respondents, among which 74% of women and 26% of men in both groups. This is an expanded study, which was done in 2014 on a smaller sample of 104 respondents.

In view of the structure of our respondents, prevailed disabled people in the sample with 54%, followed by refugees (21%) and the Romani people (15%)

In addition, among the respondents, most were persons aged between 51 and 60 (32%).

According to gender, women are only at the forefront among the respondents belonging to the group of disabled people with the share of 41%, while in the other groups, men were more affected than women

The study started from the hypothesis:

**H1:** Lack of appropriate educational programs according to the needs of marginalized groups in Serbia is the main cause of their social exclusion and inability to find employment;

**H2:** Marginalized population in Serbia leave educational process because the lack of material conditions;

**H3:** People with disabilities cannot find employment due to a stereotype that they lack working skills.

For all questions in the questionnaire there is an answer by which the respondents evaluated how much they agree with the above statement in the form of a quarter-point Likert scale (1 small, 2-intermediate 3-important, 4-very important).

## **Research Results and Discussion**

The exclusion on the basis of education and age is the most common in the opinion of the respondents due to the fact that it is most about young people that leave educational process, as well as persons older than 50 that are mostly low qualified. Among the people who leave school, the Romani are most frequent. The reasons for leaving educational process can be manifold (Foster and Norton, 2012):

- (i) the way teachers treat them (with no respect);
- (ii) students react to racial harassment that are not well handled by schools;
- (iii) they are not successful at doing homework;

- (iv) the lack of parents' cooperation and support to children to educate that results in their leaving school.

They should be added to the reasons of other nature, such as (Radovic-Markovic, 2016):

- (v) the lack of qualified educational programs for the Romani people and other marginalized groups;
- (vi) low level of self-esteem and desire to acquire knowledge;
- (vii) the lack of material conditions necessary for education;
- (viii) Insufficient social support or inability to learn due to the fact that they are forced to manage somehow in order to survive.

When asked why marginalized groups leave the process of regular education most frequently, the majority of respondents (45%) consider the lack of material conditions and the lack of social support to be the main cause of such a state. They are followed by the lack of educational programs (17%), inability to educate due to the insufficient financial support (28%) and the lack of self esteem and desire to acquire new knowledge (10%)

The analysis done on the basis of the respondents' answers to the question in which direction to change the educational programs in order to encourage learning and inclusion of marginalized groups has shown that the respondents consider that it is almost equally important to provide programs to suit their needs (35%) and those that contribute to faster employment (28%). The third most important is acquiring entrepreneurial skills (23%), while they think that encouraging creativity and cognitive abilities should not be among the priorities (14%).

From the presented data we can see that the participants are fully aware that without the appropriate programs that address their needs their faster employment cannot be expected, which is one of the basic dimensions of exclusion and poverty.

In order to test which causes difficulty in recruiting marginalized population groups in Serbia, we offered respondents four possible answers: 1. the untimely adoption of appropriate legislation; 2. the negative impact of employers' attitudes towards this population group; 3. stereotypes of other employees in terms of their difficult adjustment and integration into work teams 4. Insufficient protection mechanisms against discrimination. The largest number of respondents stated that due to the existence of stereotypes it was difficult to obtain a job in formal economy (51%). In addition, our research has shown that although there are appropriate laws, they are not



respected enough. With that in mind, they feel insufficiently protected in terms of their discrimination in employment.

There is an opinion that this problem would be significantly reduced by applying severe penalties for employers who determine the age limit, sex, religious or ethnic affiliation in the recruitment process (Radovic Markovic, 2012). However, Serbia has not yet developed legal mechanisms against discrimination, which is characterized by a small number of prosecuted offences. Also, regulations are often misunderstood and misinterpreted. Therefore, a lot is expected from the implementation of the Strategy of prevention and protection against discrimination, which was adopted in Serbia for the period 2013-2018. It provides highlights of the plan to prevent discrimination and identifies nine vulnerable groups (the Romani people, refugees and internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, rural population, the rural population in South East Serbia, the rural population that owns no land, the uneducated, as well as women, young people (aged 15-24) and older people (aged 50-64) and provides measures to improve their situation (EurActiv, 2013).

Our respondents see the greatest opportunity in employment in the public sector that they find that it should be better utilized for their involvement in the process of work (41%). Such high commitment to employment in public sector can be explained by the fact that generally the unemployed in Serbia, including marginalized groups, prefer permanent employment and choose state companies for the employer, to work in the informal sector or under contract. Namely, the state is considered desirable employer because of regular monthly income.

The reason for the fact that a small number of respondents opted to start their own business can be explained by the lack of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge that often prevents them in their entrepreneurial intentions. Namely, the above mentioned and similar studies conclude that training in the field of entrepreneurship and acquisition of practical knowledge directly influences the entrepreneurial competence.

To get the proper education that would be in function of their employment, a special fund is expected to be established to finance the training of these individuals and monitor the quality of the training programs in accordance with pre-set standards. Otherwise, education will still not be equally accessible to all, which will result in their exclusion. Respondents also expect that the state should provide more flexible working

conditions (working from home, flexible working hours, etc.) as well as to use all mechanisms to protect them from marginalization in employment.

The biggest number of respondents thinks that the position of marginalized groups in Serbia has been improving slowly due to the lack of financial means (64%) and because they are not singled out as priority issue for resolution, while other reasons are almost negligible.

## **Conclusion**

Addressing inequalities will play a major role in the future global development framework. In this context, the post-2015 development framework must be focused on a holistic and rights-based approach to development. A holistic approach to inequalities should include each type of inequality—social, political, economic and material. Also, it must be based on equality and inclusive participation, ensures that the marginalized groups can benefit from development and growth.

Based on our review, hypothesis H1 is partially confirmed. The lack of appropriate educational programs tailored to the needs of marginalized groups in Serbia is not the only major cause of social exclusion and the lack of employment opportunities. Beside the lack of appropriate educational programs, the reasons for the high rate of unemployment of marginalized groups should be sought in a large number of factors that are closely linked. These include the decline in gross domestic product, decreased productivity, high overall unemployment, the existence of budget deficits, the lack of social support and the lack of problems of marginalized groups among the priority issues of society, then the existence of stereotypes relating to their working and other abilities, the lack of implementation of measures and mechanisms of their protection, the lack of interest of employers to invest in their training, etc. According to all these reasons that underlie the high rates of unemployment, the economic development of Serbia would be the basis for more investment in the education of these groups and raising the level of their knowledge and qualifications. The main resultant of all this would be their higher employment, decrease of poverty and social inclusion. Therefore, it can be concluded that social exclusion issues should be dealt with mutually by the government and business and education sectors in order to assist marginalized groups on their way to their social inclusion.

The hypothesis H2 that marginalized population in Serbia leaves educational process because the lack of material conditions has been completely confirmed by our respondents.

H3 hypothesis that persons with disabilities cannot be employed because of the stereotypes that they lack the capacity for work has been fully confirmed by this study. There is a special exclusion of persons with higher degree of disability and women, given that there dominates a stereotype among employers that they represent a cost because they do not have working capacity. That is crucial in their engagement. However, disabled persons can be useful both for themselves and their families and the society as a whole through appropriate training and employment that matches their competencies and work skills. Accordingly, it is necessary to encourage employers to opt for employment of persons with disabilities instead of paying the penalty fund, specifically to help large companies and systems that, within their organization, can have the whole workshop staffed by disabled persons. Partnerships with NGO and with local governments should be made in order to give employers better information about legal opportunities and working abilities of persons with disabilities.

We expect that this research can trigger further empirical and research investigations and better inform policy makers towards reducing various forms of inequalities in the labour market.

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## **Diskriminacija kod zapošljavanja i socijalna isključenost: Osnaživanje žena i marginaliziranih grupa kroz proces obrazovanja u Srbiji**

### **A P S T R A K T**

*Cilj rada je bio da se utvrde diskriminatorne prepreke u zapošljavanju i uspostavljanje politike usmerene na postizanje jednakosti. Istraživanje je sprovedeno na reprezentativnom uzorku od 300 ispitanika u Beogradu (Srbija). U ovom radu je posebna pažnja posvećena sledećim pitanjima: (a) određivanju oblika socijalne isključenosti, koji su najčešći u Srbiji; (B) utvrđivanju uzroka*

*bržeg napuštanja obrazovnog procesa marginalizovanih grupa u odnosu na druge grupe stanovništva; (C) utvrđivanje uzroka teškog zapošljavanja marginalizovanih grupa u Srbiji. Rezultati istraživanja sugerisu da su restrukturiranje privrede i transformacija sistema u Srbiji isključile određene grupe sa tržišta rada, s obzirom na činjenicu da njihove kvalifikacije nisu odgovarale potrebama novog sistema. Međutim, nedostatak odgovarajućih obrazovnih programa prilagođenih potrebama marginalizovanih grupa u Srbiji nije jedini uzrok socijalne isključenosti i njihove nemogućnosti za zapošljavanje. Takođe, određene grupe stanovništva su diskriminisane zbog raznih stereotipa, stigme i predrasuda. Imajući to na umu, Srbija bi trebala da učini veće napore za uklanjanje postojećih prepreka. To bi značajno doprinelo rastu zaposlenosti, što bi dalo priliku svim nezaposlenim osobama koje su marginalizirane da se u određenoj meri društveno uključe.*

**KLJUČNE REČI:** *diskriminacija, socijalna uključenost, preduzetništvo, obrazovanje, zapošljavanje, marginalizovane grupe, Srbija*

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